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Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00

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O 231539Z JUL 76
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, LE, US

SUBJECT:EVANS AND NOVACK COLUMN, JULY 23, 1976

1. FYI FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF EVANS AND NOVACK PIECE IN WASHINGTON POST, JULY 23:

THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION (PLO) IS UNDER HIGH LEVEL SUSPICION HERE OF FABRICATING ITS WARNING THAT IT COULD NOT GUARANTEE SAFE EVACUATION THIS WEEK OF U.S. DIPLOMATS FROM BEIRUT IN ORDER TO TURN THEM INTO VIRTUAL HOSTAGES.

IF SO, THIS RAISES PROFOUND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FORD ADMINISTRATION, WHICH TODAY HAS A SPECIAL TASK FORCE
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WORKING AROUND THE CLOCK ON THE EVACUATION PLAN. IF THE

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ADMINISTRATION DECIDES THAT THE PLO IS BLOCKING THE PULL-
OUT TO GAIN LEVERAGE OVER THIS COUNTRY U.S. MILITARY
INVOLVEMENT TO EVACUATE THE AMERICANS IS NOT RULED OUT.

CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR POSSIBLE DRASTIC ACTION, WHICH THE
PENTAGON CALLS "EVACUATION IN A NON-PERMISSIVE ENVIRONMENT,"
HAVE BEEN READIED FOR MONTHS. THEY MAY NEVER BE USED, BUT
THE MERE SUSPICION BY HIGH OFFICIALS THAT EMBASSY PER-
SONNEL AND OTHER AMERICANS MAY BE TARGETED BY THE PLO AS

HOSTAGES HAS INTRODUCED A DANGEROUS NEW ELEMENT TO LEB-
ANON'S BLOODY CIVIL WAR.

WHEN THE U.S. EMBASSY IN BEIRUT REPORTED TO WASHINGTON THAT
THE SCHEDULED EVACUATION LATE MONDAY NIGHT (WASHINGTON
TIME) HAD TO BE POSTPONED BECAUSE THE PLO WOULD NOT
GUANANTEE SAFE PASSAGE, THE TELEGRAM CONTAINED NO HINT OF
PLO PLOTS OR PLOYS. BUT A LATER CABLE RAISED THAT POSSI-
BILITY DIRECTLY - PRECISELY FITTING SUSPICIONS PRIVATELY
VOICED HERE.

THE BASIS FOR THESE SUSPICIONS IS TWO-FOLD:

FIRST, WHEN PRESIDENT FORD DECIDED ON THE EARLIER EVAC-
UATION OF AMERICANS FROM BEIRUT IN MID-JUNE, THE PLO TRIED
TO COERCE THE U.S. TO USE AN AIRLIFT WHICH WOULD HAVE
MEANT RE-OPENING THE BEIRUT AIRPORT UNDER U.S. PRESSURE.
THE REOPENED AIRPORT WOULD THEN HAVE BEEN AVAILABLE FOR
SHIPMENTS OF ARMS AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR THE BELEAGUERED
PLO FORCES IN BEIRUT. THE U.S. FLATLY REFUSED, CHOOSING
EVACUATION BY SEA.

SECOND, PLO CHIEF YASSER ARAFAT IS IN DEEP TROUBLE FOR
HAVING FAILED THUS FAR TO ENLIST ARAB HELP IN HIS LOSING
MILITARY STRUGGLE AGAINST THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS AND
THEIR SYRIAN ALLIES. THAT FAILURE, FOLLOWING ARAFAT'S
ARDUOUS JOURNEYS THROUGH ARAB CAPITALS, HAS WEAKENED HIS
POLITICAL BASE AND THREATENS HIS OVERALL CONTROL OF FEUD-
ING FACTIONS AMONG PALESTINIAN NATIONALISTS.

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WHAT ARAFAT WANTS TODAY IS OBVIOUS: SERIOUS U.S. PRESSURE
ON SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFEZ ASSAD TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON
LEAVING THE PLO INTACT TO NEGOTIATE A POLITICAL SETTLE-
MENT WITH OTHER MAJOR FACTIONS IN THE CIVIL WAR.

SINCE PRESIDENT FORD HAS NO INTENTION OF ATTEMPTING ANY
SUCH THING, SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY KISSINGER HAS ORDER-
ED MAXIMUM PRESSURE TO BE BROUGHT NOT AGAINST SYRIA BUT

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AGAINST ARAFAT (THROUGH THE GOOD OFFICES OF FRIENDLY ARAB COUNTRIES, PRINCIPALLY EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA).

THE U.S. MESSAGE: PLEASE INFORM ARAFAT THAT THE U.S. INSISTS ON A PLO GUARANTEE OR SAFE PASSAGE FOR THE OVER-LAND EVACUATION BY CONVOY FROM BEIRUT TO SIDON TO NABATIYA AND, THEN WITH A SIMILAR GUARANTEE FROM SYRIA, UP AND OVER THE LEBANESE MOUNTAINS TO DAMASCUS.

IF ARAFAT EITHER FAILS TO GET THIS MESSAGE LOUD AND CLEAR OR DISREGARDS IT UNDER PRESSURE FROM MORE RADICAL PALESTINIAN LEADERS, MR. FORD FACES A SITUATION FILLED WITH POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY AT HOME BUT BRISTLING WITH DANGER IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN. A SUCCESSFUL EVACUATION OF 155 AMERICANS (INCLUDING ABOUT 25 EMBASSY OFFICERS AND SECRETARIES) FROM BEIRUT IN WHAT THE PENTAGON CALLS A "NON-PERMISSIVE ENVIRONMENT" EVOKES THE MAYAGUEZ AFFAIR, WHICH BROUGHT MR. FORD A RARE TASTE OF GLORY. BUT THE DANGERS IN ATTEMPTING WITHDRAWAL FROM BEIRUT IN A HOSTILE ATMOSPHERE ARE IMMENSE.

VIRTUALLY DESERTED BY ALL BUT RADICAL ARAB STATES, ARAFATS PLO NOW HAS ONLY ONE POWERFUL CHAMPION LEFT: THE SOVIET UNION. INDEED, MOSCOW HAS INTENSIFIED ITS RHETORIC AGAINST SYRIA, ISRAEL, THE U.S. AND RIGHT-WING CHRISTIAN LEBANESE-AND IN FAVOR OF PRESERVING ITS HEAVY INVESTMENT IN THE PLO. ANY PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE PLO MIGHT INVOLVE THE KREMLIN, WHOSE MEDITERRANEAN NAVAL AND AIR FORCES MIGHT NOW OVERPOWER THE U.S. 6TH FLEET.

SOME OFFICIALS HERE, COUNTING ON ARAFAT NOT RISKING A CONFRONTATION OF THE SUPERPOWERS, OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

DOWN THE PERILOUS ROAD MAY LIE HIS OWN POLITICAL REHABIL-ITATION. IT IS JUST SUCH EPHEMERAL POLITICAL EQUATIONS THAT MAKE A MOCKERY OF FORECASTING THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR, AND WHICH HAVE RAISED THE SIMPLE ACT OF EVACUATING A FEW DOZEN AMERICANS TO THE LEVEL OF HIGH AND DANGEROUS STATECRAFT IN WASHINGTON. ROBINSON

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